DNA oxidation photoinduced by Norharmane Rhenium(I) poly(pyridyl) complexes: effect of the bidentate N,N’ ligands on the damage profile

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Abstract: Re(I)-poly(pyridyl) complexes show quite interesting and distinctive photochemical and photosensitizing properties. This work describes the capability to induce (or photoinduce) DNA damage of three Re(I)-complexes with a naturally occurring alkaloid called norharmane (nHo) as ligand: [Re(CO)3(nHo)(L)]CF3SO3, where L = 2,2’-bipyridine (ReBpy), phenanthroline (RePhen) or dipyrido[3,2-a:2’,3’-c]phenazine (ReDppz). The interaction of the complexes with DNA was investigated by steady-state and time-resolved spectroscopy. Data show that the mode and strength of interaction depend on the chemical structure of the bidentate ligand. The complexes show a major static contribution to the overall interaction, giving rise to the formation of non-covalent adducts with DNA, and the particular trend observed was RePhen > ReDppz > ReBpy. Photo-oxidation at the purine bases represents the major DNA damaging mechanism. RePhen also induces single-strand breaks in a yield similar to that of base damage, suggesting an additional photosensitizing pathway. Also, we performed the Ames test to evaluate the cytotoxic and mutagenic properties of both non-irradiated and photoexcited complexes. RePhen, but not the other complexes, turned out to be both toxic and phototoxic for the bacteria.

Introduction

Re(I)-poly(pyridyl) complexes show quite interesting and distinctive chemical and photochemical properties, where the metal ion plays an important role due to its intrinsic reactivity and coordination geometry. Briefly, Re-complexes show relative high thermal stability, large stokes shifts and molar absorption coefficients (ε) among other peculiarities [1]. Interestingly, the photochemical and photosensitizing properties of these compounds can be fine-tuned by varying the poly(pyridyl) ligands [2]. The use of Re-poly(pyridyl) complexes has spread into different fields of bioorganic and bioorganic chemistry. In particular, they have been described as promising tools for optoelectronic devices [3], cell imaging [4], cancer treatments [5, 6, 7], DNA probes [8], etc. Although conjugated Re-complexes/nucleic-acid-oligomers have recently been shown to selectively hybridize to specific DNA sequences [9], the use of Re-complexes as DNA probes is mainly based on both covalent and/or noncovalent molecular recognition between transition metal complexes and DNA [10]. The mode and extent of noncovalent interactions strongly depend on the chemical structure of the complexes (i.e., ligands) [11].

The nature of the ligands has an important effect on the redox potential of the complexes, both in ground and excited states [12]. This effect can lead to changes in the photo-reactivity and/or photosensitizing properties [8, 11]. It is worth mentioning that several metal-complexes (based on Cu(I), Fe(II/III), Ir(III), Pt(II), Rh(III), Ru(II), Re(I), Mn(II) and others as core metals) were suggested to act as artificial nucleases [12], photo-oligonucleases [13] and/or photocleavage [12a, 14] agents suitable, in some cases, for photodynamic therapy (PDT) upon one and/or two-photon excitation [15]. In these studies, DNA damage sensitized by photoexcited metal complexes was evaluated by the typical DNA relaxation assay, where only cleavage of the phosphodiester bonds is detected (formation of single- (SSBs) or double-strand breaks (DSBs)). To date, there is only little information on the global spectrum of DNA damage and the underlying damaging mechanisms. In the particular cases of some Ru(II)-complexes, photo-adducts with guanosine (as free nucleoside) as well as with calf thymus DNA and derivatized oligonucleotides were observed [16]. Detailed studies for Re(I)-complexes are even more scarce [16]. Since these metal complexes are able to generate reactive oxygen species as well as other radical species in the presence or absence of light, DNA damage at the nucleobases level still needs to be addressed.

The present work reports the study of the photosensitizing properties of three well characterized [Re(CO)3(nHo)L]CF3SO3 complexes, where nHo (9H-pyrido[3,4-b]indole or β-carboline) is a naturally occurring alkaloid showing quite interesting intrinsic photochemical [17] and photosensitizing properties [18] and L represents three kinds of diimine ligands namely either 2,2’-bipyridine (bpy), 1,10-phenanthroline (phen), or dipyrido[3,2-a:2’,3’-c]phenazine (dppz) (Figure 1) [19, 20]. The interaction of the three Re-complexes with DNA was investigated by means of steady-state and time-resolved spectroscopy. Moreover, the type and extent of DNA oxidative damage induced by UVA-...
photoexcited complexes were assayed with the use of DNA repair endonucleases.

Results and Discussion

Photosensitization of cell-free DNA

Dose-dependence of the DNA damage induced by photo-excited Re-complexes

Supercoiled DNA of bacteriophage PM2 was exposed to UVA irradiation (365 ± 20 nm) in the presence of increasing amounts of the investigated complexes. The number of single-strand breaks (SSB) and DNA lesions sensitive to the repair enzyme formamidopyrimidine-DNA-glycosylase (Fpg), which recognizes oxidized purines and also sites of base loss\(^{[21]}\), were subsequently quantified by agarose gel electrophoresis and plotted against the UV\(^{365}\) absorption per cm (Figure 2).

The numbers of DNA modifications increase with the concentrations (absorbance) of the compounds investigated herein. Note that no significant DNA damage was observed when PM2 DNA solution was irradiated in the absence of photosensitizers (control light, y-intercept in Figure 2a). Moreover, dark incubations of PM2 DNA and Re-complexes (dark controls, Figure SI.1) showed no (in the case of ReBpy) and very low damage (in the cases of RePhen and Redppz). Thus, the larger part of the damage reported in Figure 2a is induced by the photoexcited Re-complexes.

From the data shown in this Figure, two major points deserve to be highlighted:

(i) Re-complexes are more efficient photosensitizers than the uncoordinated βC. The extent of DNA-damage induced by nHo (free βC ligand)\(^{[19b]}\) is lower compared with the Re-complexes. The comparison of the slopes of the concentration-dependent data (Figure 2a) indicates that Re-complexes were, in terms of Fpg-sensitive sites, at least 1.5-fold more potent as damaging agent than the free ligand nHo, and 4-fold more potent (with the exception of ReDppz), in terms of SSBs. This might be a consequence of a higher relative affinity of Re-complexes to the DNA molecules and/or a higher capability to generate reactive oxygen species such as singlet oxygen (see below).

(ii) the type and extend of DNA damage induced by the three Re-complexes depend on the chemical nature of the accompanying structural ligand (bpy, phen or dppz). ReBpy and RePhen induce, in a quite similar extent, both SSBs and Fpg-sensitive base modifications; whereas ReDppz only induces the latter type of modification. The difference observed could be a consequence either of a distinctive mode of interaction with the DNA-double helix (intercalation and/or groove-binding) or due to

Figure 1. UV-visible absorption spectra in methanol (top) and chemical structure of the three Re-complexes investigated in this work (bottom).

Figure 2. (a) SSBs (circles) and Fpg-sensitive modifications (down triangles) induced in PM2 DNA by exposure to UVA light (20 min) in the presence of different concentrations (indicated in units of absorption) of nHo free-ligand (white), ReBpy (red), RePhen (blue) and Redppz (black) in in phosphate buffer solutions (pH 7.4). (b) Electrophoretic agarose gels at the maximum concentration plotted in (a): Sc., Rel. and Lin. represent supercoiled, relaxed and linear DNA. Data are the mean of 4 independent experiments (± S.D.)
a distinctive photosensitizing pathway (i.e., type I, type II or a combination of both) (see below).

(iii) The agarose gel of a DNA sample irradiated in the presence of RePhen (65 μM, Aabs \( \lambda = 365 \text{nm} = 0.30 \)), when treated with Fpg protein, showed the formation of the linear DNA form (Figure 2b). Thus, RePhen relatively often induces the formation of Fpg-sensitive modifications and SSBs at two closely opposed positions of the double-stranded DNA, giving rise to the formation of double-strand breaks (DSBs).

Quantification of endonuclease-sensitive modifications in PM2 DNA: damage profiles

As mentioned above, Fpg protein (Fpg) recognizes both oxidized purines such as 8-oxoG and sites of base loss (AP sites) \([21]\). To further investigate whether AP-sites contribute to the overall DNA damage, we also determined the number of modifications sensitive to endonuclease IV (Endo IV), an enzyme that specifically recognizes AP sites \([22]\) (Figure 3). In contrast to the free nHo ligand, photoexcited Re-complexes induce quite low numbers of AP-sites (identified by endonuclease IV). Thus, the major part of the modifications recognized by Fpg protein represent photooxidised purine nucleobases, typically 8-oxoG. In addition, RePhen also shows a quite efficient generation of SSBs.

In view of the relative long-lived triplet electronic excited states of Re-complexes, the formation of cyclobutane pyrimidine dimers (CPDs) via triplet energy transfer appeared possible. Therefore, the recognition of lesions by T4 endonuclease V (T4 endo V) was also evaluated in the irradiated samples. Having in mind that T4 endo V recognizes both CPDs and AP sites, lesions were also quantified using a combination of both Endo IV and T4 endo V enzymes. \([23]\)

Data show that, as in the case of the free nHo ligand \([19b, c]\), RePhen and ReDppz are unable to photoinduce the formation of CPDs. On the contrary, ReBpy induces a significant number of modifications identified as CPDs. This fact can be explained in terms of the photophysical properties of these three photosensitizers, since only ReBpy has the required triplet state energy (i.e., \( \varepsilon_t \geq 267 \text{kJ/mol} \)) \([24]\) to spontaneously generate CPDs, through T-T energy transfer processes (see below).

Interaction with calf thymus DNA

As mentioned above, the different levels of DNA damage photosensitized by the three Re-complexes might be a consequence of the different binding affinity between each Re-complex and the DNA. To further investigate this, titration of Re-complex solutions (100 μM) with calf thymus DNA (ctDNA) were monitored by UV-visible absorption spectroscopy (Figure 4). The three Re-complexes follow the same qualitative trend. Briefly, the absorption bands of the complexes, placed between 300 nm and 450 nm, exhibit a hypochromic effect upon increasing [ctDNA]. The observed phenomenon suggests the presence of quite specific binding modes with the double-stranded ctDNA, where the nHo ligand would also contribute to the global interaction (vide infra). The extent of the interaction, quantified by eq. (1) as \( K_a \), depends on the chemical structure of the bidentate ligands: \( K_a \text{RePhen} > K_a \text{ReDppz} > K_a \text{ReBpy} \) (Table 1).

When comparing these data with those previously reported for related complexes, it is evident that:

(i) Re-complexes show larger \( K_a \) values than those observed for uncoordinated nHo ligand, suggesting that the structure Re(l)-bidentate ligands (bpy, phen and dppz) have a major contribution to the overall binding.

(ii) RePhen and ReDppz showed \( K_a \) values slightly larger than ReBpy. This tendency correlates well with the intrinsic relative affinity of these ligands (dppz = phen > bpy) to DNA and the quite poor interaction described previously for Re(CO)\(_{2}\) complexes with bpy ligands. \([25]\)

(iii) The calculated \( K_a \) value for RePhen \((4.5 \pm 0.5) \times 10^5 \text{M}^{-1}\) is of the same order of magnitude as those observed for related complexes such as Ru(phen)\(_2\)(bpy)Cl\(_2\) \((4.6 \pm 1) \times 10^4 \text{M}^{-1}\) \([24]\) showing that the phenanthroline aromatic ring is the principal responsible of the overall interaction in this complex.

(iv) Re(I)-complexes showed \( K_a \) values one order of magnitude lower than related metal complexes such as [Ru(DMP)(DIP)]\(^{2+}\) (where DIP = 4,7-diphenyl 1-10-phenanthroline) \([27]\) and [Ru(phen)(phi)]\(^{2+}\) \([28]\), with \( K_a \) values of 2.0 \((\pm 0.2) \times 10^3 \text{M}^{-1}\) and 4.7 \((\pm 0.6) \times 10^4 \text{M}^{-1}\), respectively). While it is clear that coulombic contributions (i.e., electrostatic attraction) are playing a key role in the overall interaction between these cationic complexes and the negatively charged DNA backbone, additional contributions such as steric impediment or hydrogen bonding, among others, may also be acting.

![Figure 3](image)  
*Figure 3: DNA damage profiles showing the numbers of SSBs and several types of endonuclease-sensitive modifications induced in PM2 DNA by photoexcited (UVA 366 nm) [Re(CO)\(_{2}\)(nHo)L]\(^{+}\) complexes and by free nHo. Data shown for nHo were taken from reference \([18b]\). Data are the means of 3 independent experiments (± S.D).*
The extend and type of the photosensitized damage might be modulated not only by the type and extent of the interaction between the DNA and the photosensitizer in its electronic ground state (S₀), but also in its excited state. The latter interaction was further explored by steady-state and time-resolved luminescence titration experiments. Data show that significant changes in the Re-complexes’ emission spectra in terms of both intensity and shape when [ctDNA] is increased (Figure 5). The behavior observed strongly depends on the chemical structure of the bidentate ligand. Briefly, ReBpy and RePhen showed a significant (~5 nm) hypsochromic shift of the maximum emission wavelengths when [ctDNA] increases. The hypsochromic shift is indicative of a change in the polarity environmental conditions of both fluorophores as is shown in Figure SI.2. Thus, results shown in Figure 5 confirm the interaction between these two Re-complexes and ctDNA, where ctDNA would provide a less polar surroundings with respect to the bulk solution. Also, a uniform decrease in the spectral region of the two emission bands, attributed to an nHo intraligand excited state (IL Ho) and a Metal to Ligand Charge Transfer excited state (MLCT Re-L, where L is bpy or phen), was observed. Stern-Volmer plots of the steady-state emission data (i.e., I/I₀ vs [DNA]) showed a linear behavior with both ReBpy and RePhen. The corresponding Ksv values are listed in Table 1.

In the particular case of ReDppz, an analysis on the rather low intense and short-lived emission band assigned to the MLCT Re_dppz transition could not be done. Is well known that this transition is deactivated in water by a vibrational deactivation via hydrogen bonding between water molecules and the nitrogen atoms from the dppz. This effect was also seen in ReDppz (Figure SI.3). Besides, the IL_dppz emission band overlaps with the rather intense and relatively long-lived emission band assigned to the IL Ho transition (Figure SI.2). However, a decrease of the latter band with a clear bathochromic shift is observed when [ctDNA] is increased. This indicates that ReDppz is sensing changes in the polarity of the environment, due to its interaction with ctDNA as is shown in Figure SI.2.

To further evaluate potential dynamic contributions to the overall emission quenching described above, luminescence lifetimes of the three Re-complexes were measured in the presence of increasing [ctDNA]. Lifetimes were recorded at the maximum of emission of the two distinctive emission bands (IL Ho and MLCT Re-L), except for ReDppz, which only shows one major emission band corresponding to IL Ho. In all cases, small changes of the τI/τ vs [ctDNA] relationship were observed (Figures 5, right column and Figure SI.4). This is accounted by the rather small slope (Ksv) of the corresponding Stern-Volmer representation (insets in Figure 5) that is on an order of magnitude lower than that observed for the IL Ho band (Table 1). Thus, in this particular case, a dynamic interaction between the phen ligand and ctDNA appears to play a role as an additional deactivation pathway (see below) [36].
Figure 5. Steady-state and time-resolved emission of (a) ReBpy (20 µM), (b) RePhen (15 µM) and (c) ReDppz (15 µM) air-equilibrated buffered solution with 0.2% of DMSO, recorded in the presence of increasing amounts of ctDNA. Graphs on the left: corrected emission spectra. Arrows indicate the variation in the emission spectra upon increasing [ctDNA] and the corresponding transitions for each emission bands are also depicted (initial and final concentrations are highlighted in red and black, respectively. Graphs on the right: luminiscence decays recorded at wavelengths of the emission maximum of the corresponding MLCT transition (585 nm and 575 in (a) and (b), respectively) (black lines, λexc = 341 nm), prompt signal (green line) and mono-exponential fitting curves (white lines). Insets in the graph on the right: Stern-Volmer plots of the emission intensities (I) (black circles) and lifetimes (τ) (white and cross circles for the MLCT transition and IItransition, respectively).
DNA competitive binding with ethidium bromide

It is well-known that some positively charged metal complexes with bidentate planar ligands, such as phen or dppz, can interact with double-stranded DNA through intercalation and/or groove-binding, among others. However, chemical structure of the bidentate ligands as well as electronic charge distribution on the complex can modulate the mode and extent of this interaction. To further evaluate the contribution of intercalation of the three Re(I) complexes investigated herein to the overall interaction with ctDNA, ethidium bromide (EtBr) fluorescence displacement experiments were employed. Results with the free ligand nHo were included for comparison.

Data depicted in Figure 6 show that increasing concentrations of the three Re-complexes decreases the fluorescence intensity of EtBr-ctDNA adduct. In all the cases, I₀/I vs [ctDNA] plots show a linear relationship (insets in Figure 6). The corresponding K’ₜₜ values, obtained from the respective slopes, are listed in Table 1. When comparing the slopes of the Stern-Volmer plots obtained from the Re-complexes steady-state emission quenching (Kₜₜ) and K’ₜₜ obtained from EtBr displacement experiments four points rise to the surface:

(i) the extent of intercalation strongly depends on the chemical structure of the diimine ligand: K’ₜₜ ReDppz > K’ₜₜ RePhen > K’ₜₜ ReBpy. This is in agreement with the fact that non-covalent interaction between DNA and classical planar intercalating agents depends on the extension of the planar fused-rings (dppz > phen > bpy).

(ii) In the cases of ReBpy and RePhen, intercalation contributes little to the overall interaction with ctDNA (i.e., K’ₜₜ are one order of magnitude lower than the corresponding Kₜₜ values). This is in agreement with results reported for related metallic complexes, with bpy or phen as ligands, which were shown to interact with DNA mainly by electrostatic interaction and groove binding in some cases. Thus, attractive coulombic forces are playing an important role in the overall interaction of ReBpy and RePhen with ctDNA. The latter fact also explains why Re(I) complexes sometimes have lower binding constants than related metal complexes, such as Ru(II) complexes.

(iii) The main interaction mode of ReDppz with double-stranded ctDNA appears to be the intercalation into the stacked bases (i.e., K’ₜₜ ReDppz is the same order of magnitude than Kₜₜ ReDppz). This is in agreement with the higher intercalative ability reported for related dppz-complexes.

(iv) The last point that deserves to be highlighted is related to the observation that no change of the emission spectra was observed when nHo free ligand was used as competitive agent. This result suggests that either nHo is not an intercalative agent or its intrinsic binding constant is not high enough to promote the EtBr displacement. This result is quite relevant and shed light on the mode of interaction between βCs and DNA that has been a subject of controversy for more than 40 years.

Figure 6. Displacement of EtBr (20 μM) by: (a) nHo, (b) ReBpy, (c) RePhen and (d) ReDppz. Insets: Stern-Volmer Plot of the fluorescence intensity. The concentration of the complexes increased from 0 to 60 μM (100 μM for nHo).
Table 1: Summary of Re(CO)\(_3\)(nHo)L/ctDNA interaction parameters measured in buffer aqueous solution (pH 7.4). \(K_a\) is the Benesi-Hildebrand equilibrium constant, \(K_{\text{ss}}\) and \(K_d\) are the slope of the Stern-Volmer plot obtained from steady-state (i.e., from static quenching) time-resolved (i.e., dynamic quenching) data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound</th>
<th>(K_a) /10(^5) M(^{-1})</th>
<th>(K_{\text{ss}}) /10(^5) M(^{-1})</th>
<th>(K_d) /10(^5) M(^{-1})</th>
<th>(\tau_L)</th>
<th>(\Phi)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nHo</td>
<td>0.2 ± 0.1(^{[1]})</td>
<td>2.8(^{[2]})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.54 ± 0.02(^{[3]})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ReBpy</td>
<td>1.4 ± 0.4</td>
<td>4 ± 0.3</td>
<td>0.15 ± 0.03</td>
<td>0.060 ± 0.004 (MLCTRe,ReL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RePhen</td>
<td>4.5 ± 0.5</td>
<td>31 ± 2</td>
<td>1.5 ± 0.4</td>
<td>0.055 ± 0.003 (IL(_{nHo}))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ReDppz</td>
<td>3.2 ± 0.7</td>
<td>2.5 ± 0.7</td>
<td>6 ± 1</td>
<td>0.11 ± 0.05 (IL(_{nHo}))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{[1]}\) Data from Ref \(^{[16]}\) for nHo cationic species (pH 4.4). \(^{[2]}\) Data calculated as the average of \(K_{\text{ss}}\) measured at pH 4.4 and 10.9. \(^{[3]}\) Calculated from the displacement of ethidium bromide.

Role of Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS)

Differences in the type and extent of ROS production by the photoexcited Re-complexes might also contribute to the differences observed between the photo-oxidative DNA damage profiles (Figure 3). In particular, singlet oxygen (\(1^O_2\)) is a key oxidative agent that mainly induces purine oxidation. Therefore, we quantified the quantum yields of \(1^O_2\) production (\(\Phi_{1^O_2}\)) by photoexcited ReBpy, RePhen and ReDppz. Having in mind the solvent effect on the photophysical properties of these Re-complexes, \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) values were determined in D\(_2\)O and acetonitrile, as representative polar protic and aprotic solvents, respectively (Table 2). Briefly, \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) values determined in acetonitrile were 4-7 folds higher than in D\(_2\)O. This strong solvent-effect can be explained in terms of the higher stability of MLCT\(_{ReL}\) (where L = bpy, phen or dppz) in acetonitrile with respect to aqueous solvents. In the cases of ReBpy and RePhen, the only dominant emitting species observed in acetonitrile is MLCT\(_{ReL}\) (Figures SI.2a and b). In the case of ReDppz in acetonitrile, besides the only emission band observed in aqueous solvent assigned to \(\text{IL}_{nHo}\), an additional emission band assigned to \(\text{IL}_{nHo}\) is observed (Figure SI.2c). This might be responsible for the higher efficiency of \(1^O_2\) production. Moreover, in all the cases, lifetime of MLCT\(_{ReL}\) is considerably longer in the aprotic solvent (Table 2). Besides this quite strong solvent effect, \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) also depends on the chemical structure of the bidentate ligand: \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) ReDppz > \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) RePhen > \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) ReBpy.

This latter trend correlates well with the DNA damage extent described above (Figures 2 and 3), i.e., the higher the \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) the higher the overall photoinduced DNA damage. Although oxidized DNA base modifications sensitive to Fpg-endonuclease can be photoinduced via type I and/or type II mechanism, our results suggest that \(1^O_2\) plays a key role. Note that ctDNA provides a less protic environment to the three investigated Re-complexes (Figures 5 and SI.2). Thus, for the three investigated Re-complexes a considerable increase in the efficiency of \(1^O_2\) production (i.e., in \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\)) is expected in the presence of ctDNA in comparison to pure buffer solution.

Recently, it was demonstrated that electron transfer processes between ctDNA and photoexcited Re-complexes also take place\(^{[30,33]}\). Thus, type I mechanisms might well contribute to the described overall DNA damage.

Table 2: Summary of the most relevant photophysical parameters of [Re(CO)\(_3\)(nHo)L]\(^+\) complexes discussed along the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound</th>
<th>(\Phi) (ACN)</th>
<th>(\Phi) (D(_2)O)</th>
<th>(\tau_{\text{MLCTRe}}) (ACN) / ns</th>
<th>(\tau_{\text{MLCTRe}}) (buffer) / ns</th>
<th>(E_T) (kcal mol(^{-1}))</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nHo</td>
<td>0.33 ± 0.03</td>
<td>0.08(^{[3]})</td>
<td>3.0 (N*)</td>
<td>&lt; 0.5 (N*)</td>
<td>20.8 (C(^{[3]}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ReBpy</td>
<td>0.28 ± 0.03</td>
<td>0.06 ± 0.01</td>
<td>148.2</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>269(^{[3]})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RePhen</td>
<td>0.76 ± 0.04</td>
<td>0.10 ± 0.01</td>
<td>260.6</td>
<td>155.3</td>
<td>247(^{[3]})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ReDppz</td>
<td>0.68 ± 0.03</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>27.6 (N*)</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>nd(^{[3]})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{[1]}\) Data from Ref \(^{[18]}\), for nHo cationic species (pH 4.4). \(^{[2]}\) Calculated from the phosphorescence emission maximum. \(^{[3]}\) Data from Ref \(^{[18]}\). \(^{[4]}\) Calculated from the E\(_{0,1}\) value \(^{[30]}\). \(^{[5]}\) MLCT\(_{ReL}\) state is not formed in aqueous solution, whereas \(\text{IL}_{nHo}\) is largely observed in acetonitrile (ACN). N* and C* represent the photoexcited neutral and cationic species of nHo, respectively.

Ames test

Cytotoxic and mutagenic properties of both non-irradiated and photoexcited ReBpy, RePhen and ReDppz were investigated for bacterial mutagenicity in the *Salmonella typhimurium* strain TA100. According to data depicted in Figure 7, ReBpy and ReDppz do not show any toxic and/or mutagenic effects neither in the absence nor in the presence of light (UVA, 365 ± 20 nm). The negative result can be a consequence either of a lack of drug uptake by the bacteria or a negligible photoreactivity of these two particular Re-complexes in a polar protic environment.

On the contrary, RePhen was found to be cytotoxic and this effect is clearly enhanced when subject to UVA irradiation. The results indicate that RePhen is taken up by the bacteria. The complex is non-mutagenic in TA100 in the dark. It may be, however, weakly mutagenic under irradiation at toxic concentrations, as evident if the number of mutants is calculated per survivors (see Figure SI.5). It is noteworthy that RePhen showed the highest \(\Phi_{1^O_2}\) among the diimine ligands, which is even enhanced when the complex is placed in a non-protic environment. Such a non-protic environment could be represented by the bacterial cell wall. Singlet oxygen, produced upon RePhen photoexcitation in the cell wall might reach the bacterial DNA by diffusion and give rise to photomutagenicity.
Toxicity and Phototoxicity

Mutagenicity and Photomutagenicity

Figure 7: Toxicity and phototoxicity (left panels) and mutagenicity and photomutagenicity (right panels) of (a) ReBpy, (b) RePhen and (c) ReDppz in Salmonella typhimurium TA100. Black circles and empty squares depict data obtained in dark and upon photoexcitation, respectively.

Conclusions
The current work provides insight into the interactions of three novel Re(I)-polypyridyl complexes, in both electronic ground and excited states, with cell-free DNA. Data reported herein in this work provide unambiguous evidence that the chemical structure of the rhenium ligands strongly modulates the type and extent of both the interaction (intercalation and/or groove binding) and DNA damage profile (photooxidation of purine nucleobases, and/or generation of SSBs and/or CPDs formation). The major conclusions can be summarized in Scheme 1.

Scheme 1. Main photochemical pathways involved in the DNA damage photosensitized by Re-complexes (ReBpy, RePhen and ReDppz). Red, blue and black arrows indicate the type of DNA-damage induced by ReBpy, RePhen and ReDppz, respectively.

Also, we show the photomutagenic and phototoxic potential of these complexes against Salmonella typhimurium through the classical Ames test.

Experimental Section

General

Norharmane, bpy, phen and ethidium bromide (EtBr) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich in the highest purity available (> 99.9 %) and were used without further purification. [Re(CO)₅(nH₂O)]⁺ complexes showed on Figure 1 and dppz ligand were synthesized according to the procedures described elsewhere.[18, 20]

DNA material: DNA from bacteriophage PM2 (PM2 DNA, 10⁶ bp) was prepared according to the method of Salditt et al.[35] Calf thymus DNA (Sigma-Aldrich), ctDNA, was dissolved in Tris (10 mM) with EDTA (1 mM) at pH 7.4.

Enzymes: Formamidopyrimidine-DNA glycosylase (Fpg protein) was obtained from E. coli strain JM105 harboring plasmid pFPG230.[36] Endonuclease IV and T4 endonuclease V were partially purified from an inducible overproducer (E. coli strain A32480 carrying the plasmid pTac-DenV) provided by L. Mullenders, Leiden. All repair endonucleases were tested following the procedures described elsewhere.[37]

Bacterial culture media: (i) Nutrient Broth, 2.5 g of Nutrient Broth No. 2 (Oxoid CM67, Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc.) dissolved in 100 ml of distilled water and 100 μg/ml of Ampicillin; (ii) Resuspension Medium. 1.6 g of Bacto Nutrient Broth (Difco 0003, VWR) with 5.0 g of NaCl dissolved in 1000 ml of distilled water. (iii) Top Agar, 12 g of Bacto-Agar (Difco 1040) and 12 g of NaCl dissolved in 2000 ml of distilled water. (iv) HBT buffer, 192 mg of L-Histidin-HCl, 250 mg of D-Biotin and 100 ml of L-Tryptophan dissolved in 1200 ml of 250 mM Phosphate Buffer (pH 7.4). (v) Minimal Agar, 30 g of Bacto-Agar (Difco 0140) dissolved in 1600 ml of distilled water.

Binding Studies

The room-temperature interaction of the Re complexes with ctDNA in phosphate buffer (0.1 mM, pH 7.4) aqueous solutions, was studied by (i) UV-visible absorption and (ii) emission spectroscopy. Due to the poor solubility of the complexes in buffer, 0.2% of DMSO was added to the solution. A molar absorption coefficient at 260 nm (ε²⁶⁰) of 6600 (M, in bases)⁻¹ cm⁻¹ was used to calculate the [DNA] of the stock solutions. Briefly:

(i) UV-visible spectrophotometric titration: measurements were made on a Cary 60 spectrophotometer, in quartz cells of 1 cm path length (10525 cm⁻¹ cm⁻¹ (atelina)). Spectra of the complexes were recorded in the presence of increasing amounts of ctDNA and data analyzed by the Benesi–Hildebrand approach (eq. (1)).[38] Experimental difference (ED) spectra were obtained by subtracting the spectrum at 0 mM of DNA from the subsequent spectra recorded at different DNA concentration.

\[
\frac{1}{\Delta A} = \frac{1}{\epsilon_{c}\text{-cdtDNA} - \epsilon_{c}} \left[ \frac{1}{K_{\text{c}} (\epsilon_{c}\text{-cdtDNA} - \epsilon_{c})} \right] \frac{1}{[\text{cdtDNA}]} \quad (1)
\]

where \(\epsilon_{c}\text{-cdtDNA}\) and \(\epsilon_{c}\) are the molar absorption coefficients of the binding complex between [Re(CO)₅(nH₂O)]⁺ complex and ctDNA (C–cdtDNA) and free [Re(CO)₅(nH₂O)]⁺ complex (C), respectively, at the titration wavelength. \(\Delta A\) is the change of absorbance, at a concentration of ctDNA, relative to the completely free [Re(CO)₅(nH₂O)]⁺ complex, C, ([ctDNA] = 0 M) at the same wavelength. \(K_{\text{c}}\) values were obtained from the slopes and intercepts of eq. (1).

(ii) Spectrofluorometric titration: steady-state and time-resolved emission measurements were made on a Fluoromax (HORIBA Jobin Yvon) and a single-photon-counting equipment FL3 TCSPC-SP (HORIBA Jobin Yvon), respectively. Measurements were made in quartz cells of 1 x 1 cm path length. Emission spectra and luminescence decays of [Re(CO)₅(nH₂O)]⁺ complexes were recorded in the presence of increasing amounts of ctDNA. Data were analyzed according the Stern-Volmer equations (2) and (3).[19a, 34]

\[
\frac{I_0}{I} = 1 + K_{SV}[\text{cdtDNA}] \quad (2)
\]

where \(I_0\) and \(I\) are the intensity of luminescence calculated as the integral under the entire emission spectra in the absence and in the presence of ctDNA and \(K_{SV}\) is the Stern-Volmer constant. When a dynamic process is operating, the Stern Volmer constant \(K_{SV}\) is called \(K_D\) being \(K_D = K_{SV}q_0\).
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where $k_q$ represents the quenching or deactivation constant rate and $\tau_0$ is the luminescence lifetime of the [Re(CO)$_3$(nH)$_2$O]$^-$ complex recorded in the absence of cDNA. $K_0$ was calculated from the slope of the relationship between $\tau_0$ and $\tau$, as shown in eq. (3), where $\tau$ are the luminescence lifetimes of the complexes at a given cDNA concentration.

$$
\frac{\tau_0}{\tau} = 1 + K_0 [\text{cDNA}] 
$$

(3)

If a dynamic process is operating eq (2) changes to eq. (3), where $K_0$ is the dynamic Stern-Volmer constant, and $\tau_0$ and $\tau$ are the lifetimes of the [Re(CO)$_3$(nH)$_2$O]$^-$ complexes, recorded in the absence and in the presence of cDNA, respectively. When the nature of the quenching process is static, $K_0$ is equal to the equilibrium constant for ground-state complex formation, now defined as $K_{SB}$ (for steady-state quenching), and can be calculated from eq. (2).

iii) Ethidium bromide fluorescence displacement experiments: EBBr is a typical DNA intercalating agent. Upon intercalation into the stacked bases in double-stranded DNA, EBBr fluorescence yield is greatly enhanced, about 25 times, with respect to the bulk solution. In the presence of an additional DNA intercalating compound, that might compete (displace) with EBBr for the DNA intercalating sites, fluorescence of the EBBr-DNA complex is quenched. Briefly, upon photoexcitation at EBBr lower energy excitation band ($\lambda_{ex}$ = 540 nm), fluorescence emission spectra were recorded from 550 nm to 800 nm in the presence of increasing concentration of ReBpy, RePhen or ReDppz.

Singlet oxygen production

Details of the system used have been published previously. Briefly, quantum yields of photosensitized singlet oxygen production, $\Phi_o$, were obtained using the third harmonic of a Q-switched Nd:YAG laser as the excitation source ($\lambda_{exc}$ = 355 nm). Surelite II laser (Coherent, resolution time of 1 μs). Measurements were performed in both air-equilibrated acetonitrile and D$_2$O solutions. The average signal generated by 64 laser shots were recorded to improve the signal-to-noise ratio. Single exponential analysis of emission decays was performed with the exclusion of the initial part of the signal. $\Phi_o$ was determined by measuring its phosphorescence intensity, using an optically matched solution of a reference sensitizer. In acetonitrile, the reference used was phenalenone ($\Phi_o = 0.975$), whereas sulphonated perinaphthenone (PNS) ($\Phi_o = 0.97 \pm 0.06$) was used in experiments performed in D$_2$O.

DNA photoproducts characterization

Irradiation set-up. A mixture of [Re(CO)$_3$(nH)$_2$O]$^-$ complex buffered aqueous solutions (10 mM K$_2$PO$_4$, 50 mM NaCl, pH 7.4, containing 2% ethanol (to further ensure total complex dissolution) and PM2 DNA (at 10 μg/ml) were placed in a 96 well plate on ice and then irradiated with a Philips HPW 125W lamp (365 ± 20 nm), set at a distance of 10 cm (dose of 30 kJ/m$^2$). Treated DNA was precipitated in ethanol/sodium acetate solution and, then, dissolved in BE buffer (20 mM Tris–HCl, pH 7.5; 100 mM NaCl and 1 mM EDTA) for damage analysis.

Quantification of endonuclease-sensitive modifications in PM2 plasmid. The DNA relaxation assay used to quantify endonuclease-sensitive sites (ESS) and single-strand breaks (SSB) in PM2 DNA has been previously described. Briefly, it makes use of the fact that supercoiled PM2 DNA is converted by either a SSBs or the incision of a repair enzyme into a relaxed (nicked) form, which migrates separately from the supercoiled form in agarose gel electrophoresis. In particular, enzymes used were Fpg protein (Fpg), T4 endonuclease V (T4 endo V) and endonuclease IV (Endo IV).

(Phototoxity and (photo)mutagenicity (Ames tests)

A 1/10 aliquot of Salmonella typhimurium (TA100) strains, grown in 20 ml of Nutrient Broth at 37°C for 24 h under constant shaking, was diluted into fresh medium to ensure exponential growth. After 2 h, the culture was centrifuged and placed in resuspending medium. 200 μl of the freshly grown bacterial culture (1-2x10$^8$ CFU/ml) were added to a Falcon tube containing 1 ml of top Agar and 10% of HBT buffer. After mixing, 200 μl of the desired complex at a Calc. 1:200000 before plating as described above but using regular (fully supplemented) agar.

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Keywords:

- thieno tricarbonyl complexes • alkaloids • photosensitization • DNA cleavage • electron transfer


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This work describes the photosensitizing properties of three nHo-Re(I) complexes with N,N’ ligands. The interaction of the complexes with DNA was investigated by different spectroscopies. Quantitative DNA damage analysis shows that Re-complexes are more efficient photosensitizers than nHo. Photo-oxidation represents the major DNA damaging mechanism. Ames Test showed the phototoxic and photomutagenic properties of the compounds.